
VENERABLE MASTER HAI XIAN:
A MODERN DAY PATRIARCH HUINENG

海賢老和尚：一個現代的慧能大師

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2014 EDITION

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FOREWORD

In the Diamond Sutra, an important passage goes:

須菩提！若菩薩以滿恒河沙等世界七寶布施；若復有人知一切法無我，得成於忍，此菩薩勝前菩薩所得功德。

Subhuti, If a Bodhisattva practices generosity by donating precious metals and stones as numerous as there are sand grains in the Ganges, his merit would still be vastly inferior to the Bodhisattva who understands that the ego is false and all dharma is attained by forbearance.

The part underlined is perhaps the single most important phrase in the entire sutra. This is because one's level of success in cultivation directly depends on the level of forbearance and selflessness that one can display. The Buddha has made it clear that regardless of which Dharma Door one chooses to practice, the fundamental principle behind each door is still the Threefold Training of Sila, Samadhi and Prajna. Hence, only selfless forbearance can give one the ability to resist temptation and provocation. Furthermore, diligence in cultivation is the cardinal factor that separates sincere resolve from one which is weak and doubtful. However, if one cannot exercise forbearance when difficulties or rough patches are encountered, then one will fail to maintain one's diligence or lose momentum and give up altogether.

For instance, in one edition of the Treatise on Response & Retribution (Kan Ying Pien), an excerpt of a set of instructions attached to the main essay states that:

"The third requisite is Fortitude and Perseverance. Now goodness in little things brings a speedy recompense; the rewards of great virtue come slowly. But speedy rewards consist of only trivial blessings; those which delay their coming consist of very great ones. There are people in the world who believe this, but very few who act it out with any resolution. And why? Because, after they have walked in the ways of virtue for little while, they meet with difficulties or obstacles; whereupon they are discouraged, and say, foolishly, that the laws of Heaven are really very hard to understand; so that finally they abandon p. 110 all the progress they have made so far, and allow their impatience to hinder them from reaping the rewards of their well-doing."

Hence, the key to all dharmas is none other than selflessness and forbearance. This is why the Buddha's last advice to the Sangha before his Parinirvana was that one should consider the precepts as one's teacher and hardship as one's nourishment.

Those who succeed in exercising forbearance can achieve Buddhahood. For instance, Zen Patriarch Huineng (638 -713) never strayed from single-minded cultivation and unwavering virtue despite the various severe difficulties he encountered. Thus, he was able to attain Buddhahood by simply hearing one gatha of the Diamond Sutra.

This brings us to the life story of the late Venerable Master Hai Xian (海賢老和尚). When he attained Pureland rebirth last year, he was a venerable 112 years old, and so healthy that he was still cultivating the temple fields despite his advanced age. He had successfully practiced the Threefold Training and Four Immeasurables for his whole life, despite the chaos of the Chinese Civil War, WWII, the Cultural Revolution and various other hardships such as illiteracy, misfortune and poverty. He was a living beacon of the Six Paramitas in it's highest form. More importantly, he achieved all this because he practiced mindfulness of Amitabha unwaveringly through thick and thin, and it was because of such forbearance that by the time he was in his 20s, his Samadhi of mindfulness of Amitabha was already perfected.

He attained Pureland rebirth during the wee hours of January 17th 2013. Just like the sutras state, he was already informed beforehand by Amita Buddha on which day he would achieve Pureland rebirth. This is because those who have recited the name of Amitabha to the level of single-mindedness will, on account of their Samadhi, be able to meet Amita Buddha (who will welcome them into Pureland). Since he had far surpassed this level, he had already met the Amitabha numerous times before. However, he was requested to remain in this world in each of those encounters because his exemplary conduct meant that his presence was needed to inspire confidence and serve as a beacon of light for cultivators to emulate.

Thus, it is not hard to see why he is a modern day Patriarch Huineng. Furthermore, he has also been nominated to succeed the Great Master Yin Guang as the 14th Patriarch of the Pureland School by Venerable Master Chin Kung.

Hence, the purpose of this booklet is to serve as a English commentary for the Chinese biographical documentary on Venerable Master Hai Xian's life. All cultivators of Buddhism should watch this documentary and strive to emulate the late Master's exemplary faith and diligence in reciting Amitabha's name.

Link to Documentary: <http://edu.hwadzan.com/play/65/34/0/87285>

Note: As the Author of this text, I hereby dedicate all merits towards rebirth in Amita Buddha's Pureland.

BIOGRAPHY:

Childhood and Early Life:

Venerable Master Hai Xian (1901-2013) was born in Henan province on August 19th 1901 to a local Buddhist family. His birth name was Wen Chuan Xian (文川賢) and he had five siblings. The family was poor and young Chuan Xian's father often had to travel to neighboring villages to ask for alms. When Chuan Xian was 10 years old, his father was beaten to death by bandits while trying to put out a fire set by the bandits robbing a village. The returning villagers sent his body home to be buried with honors.

When Chuan Xian reached adolescence, he witnessed several events which strengthened his faith in Buddhism. For instance, a relative of his, a malicious woman who delighted in verbally and physically abusing others, gave birth successively to four children who all died young. Furthermore, she became mentally unstable and bit her own tongue out. Finally, she died in agony shortly after giving birth to a daughter at the age of thirty two.

It was eventually understood that her misfortunes were due to the evil karma created by her malicious speech and violent behavior.

When Chuan Xian reached the age of 18, he developed carbuncles (large boils) on his leg. It was so severe that the leg became gangrenous and his life was threatened. His mother consulted numerous doctors and tried all kinds of treatments, but all to no avail. Finally, Chuan Xian realized that this illness was the result of evil karma and ceased to apply medication. He then sincerely recited the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva. Miraculously, the leg healed completely by the end of the month.

These experiences and events prompted him to seriously consider the pain and suffering of the wheel of rebirth, just like the Buddha stated in the Eight Realizations

of Great Beings Sutra:

The Eighth Realization:

Birth and death are like a blazing fire

Plagued with endless afflictions and suffering.

Vow to cultivate the Mahayana mind,

To bring relief to all;

To take on infinite sufferings for sentient beings,

And lead all to supreme joy.

Furthermore, his faith in the Buddhadharma and the laws of karma were now strong and resolute.

Life as a Monk

When Chuan Xian turned twenty years of age, he decided to leave the home life and become a monk. Thus, he bid his mother farewell and was ordained in 1920 by the eminent Dharma Master Chwan Jie (傳戒法師). Henceforth, he was known as Venerable Hai Xian. Master Chwan Jie did not teach him to practice Zen or study and speak the dharma, he simply taught Hai Xian to single-mindedly recite "Namo Amitufo". Venerable Hai Xian, being as honest as Patriarch Huineng, cultivated the mantra diligently. What many people do not know is that the name of Amitabha represents one's Buddha nature. When Huineng said that the Buddha nature is self sufficient, he is referring to that when a man's heart is the same as Amitabha, he has attained the mind seal of the Buddha. Hence, such a person no longer has outflows and is pure.

In fact, all the great sutras such as the Lotus Sutra and Shurangama Sutra are simply a expansion of the name of Amita Buddha. They were spoken to serve as an indirect way for people who still have doubt to gradually believe in the unsurpassed perfection of Amitabha name recitation. This is why the Shurangama Sutra ends by mentioning that anyone who merely thinks about teaching the Shurangama Sutra to someone can have all their heavy offenses eradicated and be reborn in Pureland. Amitabha represents the infinite merit and wisdom of the Buddha.

Hence, Master Chwan Jie recognized Venerable Hai Xian's honesty, selflessness and forbearance and thus passed to him the highest dharma. Since Hai Xian's heart was always mindful of Amitabha, his conduct naturally conforms with that of a Buddha.

For instance, he cultivated each the Six Paramitas perfectly without exception. As his heart reflected Amitabha, he was naturally not subject to the urges and defilements that cause regular people to turn their backs on the five precepts and ten virtues. His heart was pure and free from the six kinds of dusts.

In Upasaka Huang Nien Tsu's commentary of the Infinite Life Sutra, it is mentioned that there are four fields of merit. They are the Field of Gratitude (i.e. one's parents and teachers) ; the Triple Jewel Field ; the Field of the Poor, Sick and Needy and the Field of Animals.

Thus, in terms of generosity, he diligently planted in all four fields of merit. For instance, when the Red Guards came to vandalize the Stupa of his mentor, Master Hai Xian managed to retrieve beforehand the ashes of his mentor and hid it in a secret compartment. When the Communist government forbade him from reciting and forced him to serve as a superintendent for a local farming team, he continued to be mindful of Amitabha in his heart and prostrated to the Buddha at night. If there was meat in the communal pot, he would eat only the vegetables around it. As soon as the Cultural Revolution ended, he immediately returned to the temple and built a new Stupa for his mentor. What's more, he also invited his aged mother into the small temple where he resided and cared for her until she attained Pureland rebirth.

Furthermore, throughout his life, he never ceased to be assiduous with his duties. Being a farmer by former profession, he diligently cultivated many wildlands into tillable farmland. With the crops he grew, he fed his aged fellow cultivators and the poor, old and needy. In fact, he once donated about half a ton of crops that he grew by himself to relieve those affected by the 1989 floods.

Moreover, he regularly released life, helped repair bridges and led the building of temples. Even when he spotted someone stealing some of the corn he grew, he did not become hostile but generously gifted the thief the cream of the crop. Such conduct reflects the compassionate behavior of Bodhisattvas as described in the Sutra of the Eight Realizations of Great Beings:

"The Sixth Realization:

Poverty and hardship breed resentment,

Creating harm and discord.

Bodhisattvas practice dana,

**Beholding the friendly and hostile equally;
They neither harbor grudges
Nor despise malicious people."**

Whether forbearance or diligence, Venerable Hai Xian displayed both. Furthermore, at no time did his heart ever stray from virtue and the Four Immeasurables. As the name of Amitufo is self sufficient, one whose heart is in accordance with it will naturally display virtue, wisdom and equanimity at all times. This is why Venerable Hai Xian did not react with anger even when an arrogant man slapped him in the face. In all of his 112 years of life, Venerable Hai Xian lived simply, sewing his own clothes and growing his own food. If he received offerings, he would use it to print sutras and perform other acts of charity.

Lastly, on his birthday the year before his Pureland rebirth, a group of householders prepared a sumptuous meal as a birthday gift. For the first time in his life, Venerable Hai Xian did not smile and declined to eat any of it except for a few sprouts. The householders soon realized that he was teaching them by example. As mentioned before, the Buddha's last advice to the Sangha was that one should regard the precepts as one's teacher and hardship as nourishment. Hence, this display of austerity reflects this key advice.

Pureland Rebirth:

Prior to his Pureland rebirth, Amitabha appeared before him and informed him that he will be reborn in Pureland when he receives Master Hong Lin's (宏琳師) dharma book titled "If Buddhism is to Prosper ; Practitioners Must Praise Each other" (若要佛法興唯有僧贊僧).



On January 13th 2013, a visiting guest gifted the book to Venerable Hai Xian. He immediately donned his best robes and requested that a picture be taken of him with the book (see picture). It is clear that

this gesture (he had never before done such a thing) was to serve as an endorsement for the book, which has decisively neutralized recent libelous slander against the Infinite Life Sutra. Hence, we too should take the book's main advice and refrain from criticizing others. We should praise all practitioners of all branches of Buddhism and promote interfaith harmony.

In the three following days, Venerable Hai Xian visited a number of his old friends and acquaintances. Even on the afternoon of the third day, he was still working in the temple fields. When one of the junior monks asked him to retire, he simply responded that "after I'm done, I'll stop". That night, Venerable Hai Xian loudly recited the name of Amitabha continuously and by morning, he was discovered to have already entered Parinirvana in Pureland. Just like the recorded signs of Pureland rebirth in the sutras, rigor mortis did not set in and his body remained soft, flexible and fresh. Incidentally, like Bodhidharma, Venerable Hai Xian's mother's coffin was empty except for a shoe when it was exhumed for a more proper reburial.

Hence, knowing this, we should have absolute faith in our ability to attain Pureland rebirth. Everything that Venerable Master Hai Xian achieved, he did it for us, to show us our potential and inspire faith. He could have left for Pureland when he in his 20s, however, he stayed to show us the way. Therefore, we must repay such kindness by heeding the important lessons he has taught us by example.

Before we conclude this section, I will like to mention Venerable Hai Xian's encounter with a wolf. One day when he was journeying, a wolf came up to him and pulled at his robes. Venerable Hai Xian initially thought that this was his moment of death and thus diligently recited Amituofo. However, it soon became apparent that the wolf simply wished to request his help as a female wolf was dying giving birth to their cubs. Venerable Hai Xian speedily recited Amituofo to the female wolf and the power of this Samadhi instantly saved the life of the female wolf and cubs. The next day, the wolf appeared again and offered honeycombs in gratitude to Venerable Hai Xian.

Thus, if even a wolf can recognize virtue and repay kindness, how can we (as humans) neglect to repay the kindness of Venerable Master Hai Xian and heed his teachings?

IMPORTANT LESSONS

The most important lesson that Venerable Hai Xian's life teaches us is the importance

of faithfully and single-mindedly reciting "Namo Amituofo". As mentioned before, the Buddha nature is self sufficient and Amitabha is our Buddha nature. This means that this Buddha name represents the Six Paramitas, Four Immeasurables and Threefold Training in it's highest form. Thus, by reciting Amitabha's name to the level of single-mindedness, you are recovering the infinite stock of merit, utmost virtue and the unsurpassed wisdom that our Buddha nature contains. This is why you can meet Amitabha, because your heart finally yearns for him and for Pureland rebirth. The Buddha is absolutely compassionate and if you truly seek him, he will respond.

The biggest mistakes cultivators make nowadays is to seek the external instead of from within. We do this and do that. We feel that we need to read this sutra, donate to this cause and or receive those precepts. We do this for a little while and that for a little while. We then complain that the Buddha does not respond. The truth is that the fault lies with ourselves. We are not sincere and our senses still connect with the six kinds of dusts. Hence, we think we are seeking the Buddha and Pureland, but in truth, our scattered efforts and thoughts are simply asking for the six kinds of dusts.

This is the point that Venerable Hai Xian is trying to teach us. He did the humanly impossible and bore unbearable burdens in his 112 years of life. However, he did not suffer even a hair's breadth worth of stress. This is because he found the inner bliss of the Buddha nature while we seek false bliss and distraction from the outside. He did not wake up everyday making plans and checklists. He simply exercised enough selfless faith and forbearance from the get go to recite Amitabha single-mindedly, resisting all scattered thoughts, doubts and the temptation of the six kinds of dusts.

Once you are mindful of Amitabha to the level of single-mindedness, you are self sufficient and no longer bothered by attachments and aversions. With such Non-Abidance, you will effortlessly display all of the Six Paramitas and Four Immeasurables without fail. This is because all virtues and good works naturally spring from one who has accessed the Buddha nature.

Hence, the main lesson here is that we need to focus. Sincerely reciting the name of Amitabha represents cultivating Sila, Samadhi and Prajna all at once. Thus, we should strive to recite it always. Do not be distracted by mundane urges and doubts. Do not feel the need to pair your Buddha recitation with other good deeds or practices. Just diligently recite towards single-mindedness. Unwavering faith and concentration is the key to doing so. Fortitude is the shield that maintains your efforts.

"the key to success is to cultivate one dharma door unceasingly"

- Venerable Master Chin Kung

Namo Amitufo!

A FINAL WORD

It is said that human rebirth is rare and the proper dharma is hard to meet. Hence, we must treasure our time here and diligently recite Namu Amitufo to the level of single-mindedness, where the only thing on our minds is one recitation after the other. Such Samadhi will allow you to meet Amitabha and be welcomed into Pureland, thereby ending all pain and suffering.

Even if we cannot recite this Buddha name to single mindedness, the sutras do still state that just one recitation of the name will eradicate eight billion eons worth of heavy karmic offenses. Additionally, we can still be reborn in Pureland if at the moment of death, we let it all go and become mindful of Amitabha, wishing for him to appear and take us to Pureland.

In the Shurangama Sutra, it is stated that when one is at the moment of death, one will see all the good and evil that one has done in this life. Moreover, the Earth Store Sutra also mentions that when one is dying, one is often in a haze and unable to concentrate, just like how we involuntarily recollect our day in our dreams. Hence, that is why it is important to recite Amitufo regularly, doing so will help us recollect Amitabha's name at our moment of death, thereby allowing us to attain Pureland by being mindful of the Buddha at the last moment. Furthermore, the merits acquired will allow us to stay clear minded at the moment of death, thus, ensuring that our mindfulness will not be distracted by evil ghosts or manifestations of evil karma at that critical juncture.

This is why it is so important to recite the name of Amitabha to the dead and dying. Even if a person has died, it is likely that the consciousness has not yet left the body (it usually leaves 8-12 hours later). Hence, it is important to not disturb the body and to recite Amita Buddha to them. This will allow their consciousness to remain calm and become mindful of the Buddha.

As a parting word, I urgently bid all to recite Namu Amitufo continuously through

thick and thin. We may meet stress, anxieties and obstacles tomorrow, but we must never stop sincerely reciting Namo Amituofo, for it is the solution to all our problems. This mantra will cut through all of our afflictions and troubles like a knife through warm butter.

Finally, I also urge everyone to promote and propagate Venerable Hai Xian's biographical documentary, so that everyone can see this gem. Furthermore, I will like to remind everyone that one can recite Namo Amituofo in any language and variation. So Amitabha, Amituofo, Namo Amituofo, Amita Buddha etc. are all acceptable.

Namo Amituofo!

Namo Amituofo!

Namo Amituofo!

Inscription on Ven. Hai Xian Tombstone

賢公和尚，佛門榜樣。不事經懺，遠離利養。嚴持戒律，四眾欽仰。老實念佛，道在平常。淨土大經，諸佛祕藏。一句彌陀，甚深妙禪。百一十二，老當益壯。唯僧讚僧，法門興旺。弘普賢願，表法離障。續佛慧命，功德無量。自在往生，倒駕慈航

Acknowledgments:

This booklet would not have been possible without the efforts of the noble cultivators who produced Venerable Hai Xian's biographic documentary. Hence, I hope this booklet can serve as my small contribution to repay the kindness of Venerable Master Hai Xian and all those who helped made his life story known to the public.
